Report on the English as a Second Language Program Review: The Renewal of Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL Programming in Manitoba

December 2003

Accessibility, Excellence, and Equity

Manitoba
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INTRODUCTION

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth recognizes that an investment in English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and programming is an investment in the future. We value the linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes our communities and schools. We are committed to providing inclusive and equitable learning environments and programming for all students. The provision of effective Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL programming is an essential element of this goal.

The Importance of English as a Second Language Programming

Our schools reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity that has been, and will continue to be, an important aspect of our society. ESL learners represent a significant and growing body of students in our schools. We know, from experience and from decades of educational research, that appropriate and equitable programming is essential for these learners. It is therefore important that Manitoba continue to improve ESL programming by addressing challenges, building on experience and successes, and applying contemporary educational research.

While Manitoba has a long history of teaching English to non-English speakers, ESL began to emerge as an area of specialization and as a formal, well-defined programming option only three decades ago. It was first perceived to be primarily an urban education issue; more recently, it has been perceived as a broader education issue that affects most schools and school systems.

Manitoba has experienced the development and expansion of ESL programming in the past 20 years. In 2001, 453 public schools and approximately one quarter of Independent schools in Manitoba reported having ESL learners within the last three school years.

While many ESL learners are Canadian citizens who were born in Canada, many others are newcomers to Manitoba. Immigration has and will continue to play an increasingly important role in our economic and social development. While some newcomers are fluent in English and/or French, others have had limited exposure to English and it is an additional language they need to acquire. ESL programming plays an important role in the successful integration of these new Canadians.

Changing Demographics and Challenges

In the last decade there have been significant social, economic, and educational developments, as well as changes in the student population.

- The greater linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity of learners requires more effective responses to their educational needs, to ensure their eventual success in school.
- Aboriginal learners are an important aspect of the cultural and linguistic diversity in Manitoba.
- Urbanization, transiency, and other demographic factors have led to an increase in the Aboriginal student population in most schools. This has resulted in more schools being challenged to provide culturally relevant and appropriate education.
- Immigration has played a crucial role in ensuring Manitoba's continued economic growth. Manitoba has made a commitment to double the number of immigrants attracted to the province. It is expected that immigration to Manitoba will grow over the next decade.
- Changes in newcomer settlement patterns to include more rural areas mean more schools and school divisions are challenged to provide local programs for ESL learners.
- More newcomers to Manitoba are of refugee or war-affected origins, and have had their schooling interrupted.
- The growth in the number of international students coming to study in the Kindergarten to Senior 4 system has implications for school-based ESL programming.

About the ESL Program Review

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth's decision to launch a review of ESL programming in 2001-2002 was driven by several factors. The Department's *K-S4 Education Agenda for Student Success* helped to focus attention on the needs of diverse learners, and re-energize efforts aimed at reducing educational disparities. Further, there was a need to evaluate the effectiveness of ESL programming and supports introduced over the last two decades.

The purpose of the ESL Program Review ("the Review") was to

- collect and analyze information on the current state of ESL programming, and the challenges experienced by schools and learners

- explore how the province could strengthen ESL programming through consultation, and by drawing on research and experience in Canada and internationally
- provide recommendations that could form the basis for a departmental strategy and plan for strengthening ESL programming

The Review was planned, coordinated, and facilitated by a team representing Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, Advanced Education and Training, and Labour and Immigration.

The Review has three distinct phases:

- **Phase 1: September 2001-February 2002:** launch of the initiative and survey of the field
- **Phase 2: February 2002–July 2002:** consultation sessions and survey of practices in other jurisdictions
- **Phase 3: July 2002-December 2003:** preparation of the ESL Program Review Findings/Report; sharing it with the field, community groups, and agencies; and the development of a departmental strategy and action plan

A survey focusing on current practices and challenges was completed from November 2001 to February 2002. The survey gathered data from superintendents/directors of school divisions, principals of public schools reporting ESL learners in the 2000-2001 school year, and principals of Independent and First Nations schools. A summary report is available on Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth's website at: <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/diversity/esl/index.html>.

From March to July 2002, the ESL Program Review team held 16 consultation sessions attended by approximately 200 individuals, including teachers, principals, divisional administrators, representatives of educational associations, and students. The sessions addressed all aspects of Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL programming in Manitoba, and sought views on what is working and what needs improvement. School divisions, educators, and interested individuals were invited to make written submissions.

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WHAT WE LEARNED

The findings highlighted the significant growth and change since the Department began supporting ESL programming in 1979-1980. ESL has evolved from being primarily a concern of the Winnipeg School Division and some Aboriginal communities to being a provincial issue that has a direct impact on over 500 schools throughout the province. ESL learners are important members of all schools in Manitoba, whether the schools are public, Independent, or First Nations schools.

The Review provided evidence that many schools and school divisions have developed successful programming and instructional models that will serve as a good base to strengthen and build on ESL programming. Students, community groups, and agencies provided testimony to the positive impact of ESL programming and ESL teachers on ESL learners. ESL supports facilitated the integration of ESL learners into Canadian society, and helped them to meet their educational goals. It is also evident that a range of programming approaches has been implemented to respond to diverse student and school needs.

However, the Review also highlighted the inconsistency of programming and instructional practices across the province, the difficulty some students experience in accessing ESL programming, and the challenges schools face in developing local programs. While there are some successful models and programs in the province, as a whole, ESL programming tends to be developed and implemented on an ad hoc basis. Programs are often fragile. Furthermore, the increasing diversity of students, and the fact that some students face greater challenges and require more supports than others, was clearly expressed. This was particularly true of schools that have significant student populations from refugee and war-affected backgrounds.

Key Findings

The key findings that resulted from this process have been organized into several categories or themes.

What Does "ESL Learner" Mean? Defining ESL Learners

Often, schools lack accurate information as to the linguistic diversity of their students. Furthermore, there is a need to more accurately distinguish between ESL learners, English as a Second Dialect (ESD) learners, and students for whom English is their first language but who have limited literacy skills or language experiences. Each group

of learners requires or would benefit from distinct programming, so defining who the learners are is an essential starting point.

The Review pointed to the need to develop a common provincial definition of an ESL learner, which could be used as the basis for determining who will benefit from ESL programming and who is eligible for it. In light of concerns raised concerning the limitations and connotations associated with the term ESL, there may be a need for a more accurate and inclusive term, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL), as is the case in British Columbia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and increasingly in international settings.

Identification, Assessment, and Monitoring of ESL Learners

More accurate screening processes and tools for determining students' proficiency in their dominant language(s)—be it English or another language(s)—are essential. Although some schools have developed effective identification and assessment processes, a common reception and intake protocol as well as common identification, assessment, and monitoring tools are desirable.

Consistent documentation requirements would help in monitoring students' progress, and would facilitate student transfers between schools and divisions. Several submissions indicated that strong interagency collaboration is required to ensure that newcomer students are effectively integrated into school settings, and that their families are provided with required supports.

Linguistic Diversity and Aboriginal Learners

Aboriginal communities are linguistically and culturally diverse. They are an important component of the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of our schools and communities. 2001 Census information indicates that approximately 30% of Manitobans who identified themselves as Aboriginal reported having a "mother tongue" or first language other than English. It is therefore likely that a similar percentage of Aboriginal children enter the school system with an Aboriginal language as their first language, or as bilingual speakers. From another perspective, the Census information suggests that about 70% of Aboriginal children enter school with English as their dominant language.

However, during the Review, some Aboriginal educators expressed the belief that some Aboriginal learners may speak a form or dialect of English that has been significantly influenced by an Aboriginal language. They believe that English as a Second Dialect (ESD) factors could play a very important role in these students' linguistic development, and ultimately in their academic development.

In the last decade, many educators throughout the world have begun to look more closely at ESD issues with respect to Indigenous peoples and other groups. Canadian and Australian researchers suggest that ESD students would benefit from initial programming and instructional approaches similar to those implemented for second language learners. In fact, some Canadian provinces support both ESL and ESD programming.

During the consultation sessions, Aboriginal educators and other participants highlighted the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal communities, and emphasized that it was important to distinguish between Aboriginal ESL and ESD learners. While both groups of learners share some characteristics and needs, they may be quite different in other ways. Therefore, gathering accurate information about the prevalence of English dialects among Manitoba's Aboriginal learners, and evaluating the impact of ESD on their academic and linguistic development, are critical next steps in identifying appropriate programming models and instructional approaches.

The Review revealed that most instructional approaches have been English first language "enrichment" approaches, rather than second language acquisition or ESL approaches. There is a need to develop more effective programming models and instructional approaches that recognize the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners. It is therefore important to explore ways in which departmental initiatives, such as the Aboriginal Academic Achievement, can support the development of more effective programming. Collecting information on Aboriginal identity and student composition through the Education Information System (EIS) will help in this effort by giving us a better understanding of the cultural origins and sense of identity of Aboriginal students in our schools.

More Accessible, Consistent, and Effective Programming

The Review confirmed that classroom integration with differentiated instruction is the most common form of ESL programming offered in Manitoba schools. This approach is perceived by both teachers and principals to work if implemented effectively, and if appropriate supports are put in place. There was a strong indication, however, that there is generally a lack of formalized programming, and that a great deal of ESL programming has been undertaken in the form of "resource teaching."

Some participants attested to the importance of "whole school" approaches in building effective ESL programming. When ESL learners are perceived to be the responsibility of the whole school, the learning environment is strengthened and becomes more inclusive. Some schools spoke of the importance of partnering ESL students with non-ESL learners, or developing peer support groups such as "ambassador clubs." ESL learners spoke of the isolation and alienation they sometimes experience when ESL programming is not available or is limited in the school, or when the school environment does not welcome ESL learners.

During the consultation process, strong support emerged for the development of a formalized and consistent provincial ESL programming/curriculum framework and implementation guide. Such a framework would need to provide flexibility and programming options to allow for a range of learner abilities and a range of school needs.

Supporting ESL Programming and Targeting Resources

While some school divisions noted that existing funding arrangements do provide for personnel directly related to ESL programming, there was a strong indication that many schools and school divisions feel that current funding arrangements do not adequately meet their ESL programming needs. A number of concerns with the current funding mechanism were raised, including the

- amount of funding per student
- duration of funding eligibility
- difficulties that flow from basing funding on September 30 enrolment data

Concerns were also raised about accountability or targeting of ESL funding and supports. Many participants were not clear as to how resources allocated to schools were utilized in their division. This suggests the need for greater divisional transparency in the targeting of funding to schools that have ESL learners and provide ESL programming.

The Review highlighted the need to revise the existing funding mechanism and to differentiate funding on the basis of student proficiency and needs. More specific regulations, documentation requirements, and programming expectations would increase accountability to students and families, and provide a mechanism for ensuring that funding is more closely linked to planning and programming. Additionally, there were several calls for provincial monitoring of ESL learners and their progress through the Education Information System, and the use of Individual Education Plans for planning p rogramming.

While public school divisions receive ESL support in the form of a categorical grant, Independent schools receive ESL support through their Instruction and Services Grant. The Instruction and Services Grant is based on 50% of the per-pupil net operating expenditures of public school divisions, which includes ESL expenditures.

Building Greater Capacity to Respond to ESL Learner Needs

Teachers

The Review revealed that many teachers assigned to ESL programs have had limited formal ESL or second language training. Currently, classroom and resource teachers are delivering the majority of ESL programming. Only a few schools or school divisions reported employing ESL specialists. Manitoba faculties of education provide courses in ESL and second language teaching methodologies, but these are not mandatory courses. While teachers are able to respond to the needs of ESL learners with some success, there was strong support for enhancing the professional development opportunities available to teachers. Some participants called for mandatory ESL training for all pre-service teachers, and the creation of provincial ESL specialist teacher qualifications.

Schools and School Divisions

School environments that welcome diversity, engage ESL learners, and implement anti-racism policies and strategies are more inclusive for all learners. School plans should address issues of staffing, specific programming, and parental involvement to support ESL learners. The need to develop strong divisional- and school-based resource and materials collections was identified as an important priority.

The Review identified the need for divisions to establish ESL supports such as specialist positions or divisional ESL teams or networks. There was also strong support for building the local capacity of schools through coordinated, divisional ESL programming and related teacher professional development, with division-based resources and materials available for programming support.

Other initiatives, which were supported as vehicles for strengthening the capacity of school divisions to provide ESL programming, included

- collaborative strategies, such as across-divisional development and offering of ESL programming, or sharing of divisional ESL specialist services
- providing for transitioning of students into the regular programming by providing short-term clustering of ESL students, or creating "ESL centres of excellence" or designated schools when divisional size, location, and/or a low ESL student population make it difficult to offer a significant level of support

The need to encourage and enhance greater community access and parental involvement through initiatives such as community liaison officers and the provision of translators or interpreters was often highlighted.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth

School divisions, schools, and community organizations saw Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth as playing an important leadership and coordinating role in developing a stronger provincial approach and base for ESL programming. They identified the need for increased capacity for ESL programming within the Department. This is especially important given the few ESL specialists in schools in Manitoba. (Only one school division currently provides a divisional ESL specialist.) Other suggestions focused on support for a provincial "programming framework" and related resources.

Participants attested to the effectiveness and flexibility created by the ESL or "E" designation for Senior Years courses, which was introduced as part of the *Towards Inclusion* series in 1996. In addition, many schools have developed School-Initiated Courses (SICs) specifically for Senior Years ESL learners. There is a need to build on these experiences and to develop more consistent and common resources. Senior Years schools and teachers advocated for the development of a series of specialized provincial ESL courses and implementation manuals.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth should seek to work collaboratively to develop general/provincial ESL resources and supports for Aboriginal communities and learners, including Independent and First Nations schools.

Building Circles of Support for Refugee and War-Affected Learners

Manitoba is a safe haven and has provided the opportunity to start anew for many families and individuals who have had their lives disrupted as a result of civil unrest, war, and political or other forms of oppression. While students of such backgrounds often exhibit enormous resiliency and have excellent survival skills, they also face many challenges integrating into a new society and overcoming the effects of their refugee experiences.

The Review highlighted the enormous difficulty that learners and schools face in meeting their educational goals when adolescent ESL students enter the school system with limited first language literacy skills and with significant academic gaps due to disrupted schooling. In addition, students from refugee and war-affected backgrounds often have complex social and emotional needs which, if unmet or unresolved, may affect their ability or preparedness to learn.

The Review highlighted ways to strengthen current ESL programming models and the need to develop more intensive programs that are specifically targeted to meet the needs of all ESL learners of refugee and war-affected origins, especially adolescents and young adults. Participants stressed the need for greater collaboration with agencies that may provide appropriate counselling or mental health services, in conjunction with specialized newcomer ESL programs. An integrated system of regional agencies and organizations could assist with settlement, home-school issues, and parental involvement, and could provide better links between school-based ESL programming, adult learning centres, and adult ESL programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ESL Program Review Committee has responded to the Review with the following recommendations. Collectively, they could form the basis of a multi-year provincial action plan to strengthen Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL programming in Manitoba. The action plan aspires to enhance **accessibility**, ensure **excellence** in ESL programming, and create more **equitable** school and learning environments.

1. The Department develop a provincial ESL programming framework that could include
   - a policy statement based on the concept that ESL is an "additive" second language learning process, intended to provide transitional programming for English as an Additional Language learners
   - a provincial ESL learner reception and assessment protocol, and instruments for the screening, initial assessment, and monitoring of ESL learners
   - a provincial ESL curriculum "companion" document which would serve as a guide for adapting and differentiating instruction for ESL learners as they move through various stages of their ESL development, and for developing specialized ESL programming and courses
   - a support document and sample Individual Education Plans for Senior Years ESL learners, to support the implementation of ESL or "E" designated courses
   - a series of provincial Senior Years ESL courses for newcomer and international students
   - provincial guidelines for the provision of ESL and educational services for international students

2. The Department work collaboratively with schools, Aboriginal organizations, and communities to address the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners by

   - establishing a provincial group to undertake research and study the linguistic diversity of Manitoba's Aboriginal student population and ESD issues, to develop a school and teacher support document on Aboriginal linguistic diversity and best instructional and programming practices. This would include collecting and analyzing relevant student data, reviewing literature, consulting with schools, and gathering examples of best practices in Manitoba and other jurisdictions.
   - developing culturally appropriate and relevant ESL programming resources and supports, especially with regard to the development of an Early Years screening protocol or instrument for assessing the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners
   - encouraging and supporting school divisions in developing Aboriginal Academic Achievement initiatives to address the ESL, ESD, and Aboriginal languages learning needs of Aboriginal learners

3. The Department clarify what programming and support ESL funding may be used for, and explore the feasibility of enhancing funding for ESL programming over the next several years by

   - extending the length of time for which students may be eligible for funding
   - increasing funding available in the first year of a student's eligibility
   - establishing a multi-period reporting process for eligible ESL students
   - establishing an ESL Newcomers (Innovations) Support Grant to encourage the development and implementation of programming for newcomer "high needs" ESL learners of refugee and war-affected backgrounds who have limited school experience, academic gaps, and limited first language literacy
   - establishing a provincial ESL learner database to facilitate the assessment and monitoring of ESL learners

4. The Department require school divisions to have formal divisional or school ESL policies and/or protocol documents, and encourage the inclusion of ESL in divisional and school plans.

5. The Department provide ESL consultant services to support school divisions and Independent schools in developing divisional/school ESL policies, programming protocols, and programming models, and in implementing ESL reception and monitoring protocols and processes.

6. The Department encourage school divisions to take other initiatives to support planning and local capacity building of divisional ESL protocols, such as creating teacher professional development networks, developing resource and materials collections, and establishing ESL specialist positions.

7. The Department collaborate with Manitoba Labour and Immigration, settlement agencies, school divisions, and schools to enhance interpretation and first language assessment capacity.

8. The Department collaborate with partner organizations to enhance opportunities for professional development related to ESL and anti-racism/multicultural education, and to encourage faculties of education to better prepare future teachers for working with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

9. The Department collaborate with the Department of Labour and Immigration, and school divisions and schools to develop divisional and school-based initiatives to support the initial reception and settlement of newcomer students. This may include strengthening the relationships with settlement officers in schools, developing a newcomer educational and language profile, delivering professional learning opportunities with respect to refugee and war-affected students, and producing multilingual parent support documents.

10. The Departments of Advanced Education and Training, and Labour and Immigration, in collaboration with the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, establish a working group to develop a provincial strategy for enhancing the ESL and training/educational opportunities of adult ESL learners and late entry newcomers, who may need to meet Manitoba's Senior Years graduation requirements.

11. The Department establish an advisory committee to provide advice and feedback regarding the development and implementation of the action plan.